MEDICAL PRACTICE

Some Autumn Books

Desert island books

A recent "Any Questions?" we received asked the following: "I am about to go to a desert island for three years, and have been given £300 to spend on medical books. What would you recommend I should choose?" We therefore asked two doctors with experience of singlehanded practice in remote conditions and their replies are printed below.

The book chest for Tegwan

JOHN STEVENS

Dear David,

Many thanks for your letter. It's no problem; I still have the book chest list from my previous journeys to practise outside the safety of England. I'm glad you're going to Tegwan before settling down in practice for ever. One of the most valuable things my minor expeditions have done for me is to act as a vaporising dish for crisis medicine. For the first time you will realise it is rather easy and rather dull, and you will enduringly enjoy and realise how difficult is general practice in this developed kingdom when you return.

The clinical problems which you will meet are dealt with in the enclosed *BMJ* reprint,[1] written by the three members of our partnership when we worked in turn in developing lands. "Despite technical excitements," we wrote then, "it is the wide general medical experience and medical commonsense that one already has, but almost always undervalues, which forms the basis of your work abroad, just as it does at home. It is also the measure of your true value as a doctor there, as here." Do learn the technical things here in the next few months before you go. To go without them may mean exposing yourself unnecessarily to anxiety and embarrassment. You cannot learn the fundamental things well from books, but once you know about the following I believe you can learn from books to do anything (well, nearly anything).

Learn a good safe anaesthetic technique, how to intubate, and how to do a spinal. Learn to open and close a belly safely and repair stab wounds, and how to do a rapid lower segment caesarean section after crash induction. Refresh your mind on plaster techniques. Put up a few scalp vein drips. Do some necropsies. Learn a simple block technique for dental work, and extract a hundred teeth before you go. Perform a few craniotomies under guidance—learn what to do with depressed fractures. These few things will greatly extend your usefulness to the people you go to serve.

Books as a bulwark

My books have served me well and nourished me on three occasions: as a general duties medical officer in Swaziland; on a hundred-day voyage as surgeon and seaman in a square-rigged barque; and for a six-week period looking after a film crew of over 400 in a primitive part of Spain. The contents of your book chest will fall naturally into two halves—both equally important. Firstly, the surgical and medical books; they will be your ever-present tranquillisers against the doubts and anxieties of a hundred strange eventualities. With them, you need never be afraid. Secondly, and even more important, to enable you to function well medically will be those favourite books which will unconsciously remind you of who you are and buttress the social fountsprings that made you. They will prevent the most serious disease that can afflict the strongest and most unlikely abroad—anomie. If you don't love the printed word, dressing for dinner in your grass hut and drinking Kerula from your favourite Waterford will be found to be equally effective.

Surgery first, for there will grow your major fear. Extinguish it with Bailey's *Emergency Surgery*, Ellis's *Casualty Officer's Handbook*, Grant's *Anatomy*, Wiles's *Fractures*, and Keele and Matheson's *Intra-Abdominal Crises*. Donald's *Practical Obstetric Problems* and Holmes's life-saver—*Illustrated Obstetrics*—should live in your new labour ward. Sick children will be near the top

of your angst hierarchy. Catzel's *Paediatric Prescriber* dwelt in my pocket the whole time. Ramsey and Emond's *Infectious Diseases*, Jolly's *Diseases of Children*, and Jelliffe's *Diseases of Children in the Sub-Tropics and Tropics* will be all you need for that.

There will be excitements, which rapidly become less so, in surgery and obstetrics. But commonplace medicine will fill most of your day. Cecil and Loeb (now Beeson and McDermott), Manson's *Tropical Diseases*, Seward's *Bedside Diagnosis*, Gelfand's *Sick African*, Canizares's *Tropical Dermatology*, Birch's *Emergencies*, Harvard's *Treatment*, and Laurence's *Clinical Pharmacology* will answer all your questions. Campbell's *Clinical Physiology* and Boyd's *Pathology for the Physician* should remind you that thought, even on a tropic island, is necessary for the practice of good medicine. Finally, Bisley's *Ophthalmology for Developing Countries* and Newman's *ENT Emergencies* should complete your clinical bookshelf.

The terms of reference in your letter were "What books should I buy to enable me to practise all branches of medicine in Tegwan to the limit of £300?" We have spent about £200 so far; spoil yourself with three airmail editions, for few things will lighten your professional isolation more than "talking" with your brothers in recent journals. You will have your own favourites: I'd plump for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, the *British Medical Journal*, and the *Drugs and Therapeutics Bulletin*. Whatever you do, get someone to send you Michael O'Donnell's latest news from Slagthorpe.

You've still got a little left to extend and excite a perspective that will develop as soon as clinical confidence is restored—just as it usually does after a year or so in general practice. Quite suddenly you will want to look at your new patient—the whole community of your island. Morris's *Uses of Epidemiology*, King's *Medical Care in Developing Countries*, Morley's *Paediatric Priorities in the Developing World*, Pickles's *Epidemiology in Country Practice*, and Bryant's *Health and the Developing World* will give you something to till that field, which, unlike those in the Western world, can give high pay-off in reducing your clinical load.

Hilda Kuper's *The Swazi*, Lewis's *Social Anthropology*, Mead's *Anthropology*, Lefland's *Analysing Social Settings*, Philip Woodruffe's *The Men who Ruled India*, Giddens's *Durkheim*, and Plomer's *Turbot Wolfe* will focus a dilettante's eye on things you would not otherwise have noticed, and which matter very much indeed.

Books for balance

And what of the other half of your necessarily small book chest? The half that will keep you whole and enable you to practise good medicine? Of the passions in my life, my books have been one of the most important. I know they have in yours. The selfish pleasure in being able to choose at will those with whom one would listen and talk has never palled from earliest childhood. Part of the great magic in being a doctor is the ability to live two lives almost simultaneously: that as a man of action in the real world outside; the other as contemplatist of a chosen inner world catalysed by the written word. With Neville Cardus, "I do not claim any virtue for having worked hard in my studying . . . I wasn't trying to make good; I have read and studied out of sheer lust for pleasure . . . I didn't need to spend my money on pot; I could get my 'trips' without cost by going into the . . . library." Hakluyt in 1589, in his "Epistle Dedicatorie" to his magnificent *Navigations*, describes a similar discovery on a visit to his cousin's library in the Middle Temple, where "things of high and rare delight the doors whereof were so happily open before me." What set his imagination on fire gave him, like many after him, three lives for the price of one.

My delights are not necessarily yours. I list my choices merely to establish a principle for those who, like you and me, consciously put our inner selves to great hazard by immersing ourselves as servants of a totally alien culture. Consider how you were socially made, and take with you from your library those few of each of your main constructors.

The study and practice of medicine have shaped me hugely. Not only its fascinating scientific aspects, but the sense of excitement of belonging to a brotherhood. I bought Guthrie's *History of Medicine* as a submariner during the war, and it lit a small inextinguishable flame. My personal choice for this section of the book chest would be Guthrie, Moore's *History of Barts* (and his son's most curious *Mast and Sail*), Needham's *History of Embryology*, Coope's *Quiet Art*, and Major's *Classic Descriptions of Disease*. Osler's *Aequanimitas* and Spence's *Purpose and Practice of Medicine* keep me on the straight and narrow from time to time.

Thinking and acting

An increasing interest of mine in recent years has been in the way we think and act. I am not yet clearly convinced that it has a practical value. From it I derive the very private pleasure others seem to get from chess, bridge, or solving mathematical problems —all of which I abhor. Susser's *Causal Thinking*, Lazarsfeld's *Language of Social Research*, Feinstein's *Clinical Judgement*, Jacquez's *Diagnostic Process*, van der Post's *Jung*, Abercrombie's *Anatomy of Judgement*, Magee's splendid distillation of *Popper*, Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and Bronowski's *Ascent* all fascinate me. These and three Penguin favourites on *Systems Thinking*, *Decision Making*, and *Creativity* could keep me happily busy the whole monsoon through.

Time goes too fast for me, and one lifetime is not enough. One of my greatest accidental good fortunes has been to be fully professionally trained for both medicine and being a sea officer —both extraordinary combinations of art, science, and action. Hakluyt's *Voyages*, Taylor's *Haven—Finding Art*, Bradford's *Journal*, Mattingly's *Armada*, Anderson's *Seventeenth Century Rigging*, Mars's *The British Submarine*, and Newby's brilliant *Last Grain Race* totally enthrall one with their descriptions of one of man's most unnatural activities—the battle and conquest of the open sea. Mahan's, Oman's, and Peter Padfield's *Nelson*, Tucker's *St Vincent*, Villiers's *The Way of a Ship* and his *James Cook*, Slocum's *Circumnavigation*, Bush's *Flowers of the Sea*, and Collingwood's *Journal* never fail to bring alive the men who moved those ships and opened with sublime courage the oyster of our world.

I was born in the shadow, stench, and clamour of what was then the largest sugar mill in the world. My father went to work in it at the age of 12, escaping briefly to fight with the Fifth Suffolks in 1914. The great simple machinery of that factory, the pumps, tractors, threshers and binders, and generators on our later farm, and the steam (yes—even a glorious triple reciprocating monster in the *Cyclops*) main and auxiliary machinery of the ships I served in have meant that in the next reincarnation engineering will be high on my list. Simple means of harnessing energy are as entirely fascinating and satisfactory as electrical and nuclear energy are not. Rolt's *Brunel* and his *Victorian Engineering*, Cossons's *Industrial Archaeology*, Spratt's *Marine Engineering*, Corlett's *Iron Ship*, Gilbert's *Machine Tools*, and Gales's *Iron and Steel Industry*, illuminated by Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, and Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire* and *Age of Revolution* allow me a dishonest and romantic enjoyment I would most certainly have never experienced working a Black Country blast furnace for 80 hours a week.

The magic of poetry and music have, sadly, passed me by entirely, and I would miss neither on your island. I would compensate with both Pevsner's and Norman Scarfe's *Suffolk* and both Warner's and Gaunt's *Marine Painting*, Levy's *Lowry*, and Baskett's *Constable*. There is still a layer left in the chest and hedonistically, with unanalytical pleasure, I admit to my last secret "meddling." I would take these oddly assorted volumes which I have read again and again for some indefinable pleasure they never fail to provide—Platt's *Private and Controversial*,

Browne's *Religio*, V S Pritchett's *Cab at the Door*, Maugham's *Short Stories*, W H Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago* and the *Shepherd's Life*, Hartley's *Go-Between*, the Admiralty's *Ocean Passages of the World*, the 1849 *Navy List*, Mervyn Peake's *Captain Slaughterboard*, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Wouk's *Caine Mutiny*, Asa Briggs's *Victorian Cities*, Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, Leigh Fermor's *Mani*, and Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*. And there is just room for my file of those precious 50 or so reprints that I have read a dozen times apiece.

Well, David, that's it, and that's all. Knowing you well, don't be tempted to take fewer books than I did. Most of us are lesser men. We endanger ourselves by too close contact with very different others. The Schweitzers who calmly grow for half a century with God, Bach, and scalpel are few and far between. Such experiences as you risk either expand or shrink one. You can armour yourself with work, power, or getting stoned on Kerula—or your books. I'd stick to the latter. They may not stand for pure courage—but they've been a security blanket that has never failed me all my life. I envy you most for what I long for most; and what medicine deprives me of more than anything —the priceless treasure of time to read. On Tegwan you will have that for the first and last time.

We wish you and the family well—don't forget their books, as well as their bikinis. Let us both, on this his anniversary, raise our enamel mugs of Kerula to William Caxton for those marvellous machines he brought to England on leaving Sluys five centuries ago.

Yours ever,

John

Reference

[1] Acheson, N, Stevens, J, and Tait, I, *British Medical Journal*, 1965, **2**, 927.

Pacific island views

JOHN CUNNINGHAM

My Pacific island lies just north of the Tropic of Capricorn exactly half way between the Society and Friendly Isles—which may be why I'm paid for my services partly with coconuts and partly by engaging smiles. It has no name and is rarely visited, thanks to a massive coral reef which rears out of the sea a mile from the shore. With a population of 2500, neatly card indexed by simply cutting nicks out of their extraordinarily large nose rings, I've been able to apply my limited talents to the full, while enjoying the luxury of ample free time to enjoy my hobbies.

Professor Ian Donald will no doubt forgive me for quoting his aptly chosen words which preface *Practical Obstetric Problems:* "To all who have known doubt, perplexity, and fear as I have known them. To all who have made mistakes as I have. To all whose humility increases with their knowledge of this most fascinating subject—This book is dedicated." Published by Lloyd Luke, my copy is widely thumbed, and responsible for an encouraging rise in the population.

Gynaecology by Ten Teachers, published by Edward Arnold, is read widely by the entire community and, with modesty limited to half a coconut, I can happily forget my unequal battles with miles of underwear and skin-tight jeans. We have a party every Friday night and on somewhat hazy Saturdays I open two books on a clean banana leaf: *An Outline of Orthopaedics* and *An Outline of Fractures*, both written by J Crawford Adams and published by Churchill Livingstone. The ingenuity of the natives in producing an amazing variety of fractures and other orthopaedic problems mostly results from a tendency to try to climb non-existent coconut trees. Through the excellent advice of these marvellous books I have never failed to meet the challenge.

My clinic is thatched with interwoven bamboo and on my turtleshell desk lies a copy of Maurice King's *Medical Care in Developing Countries* (my bible and constant guide). In a corner stands one of my few pieces of modern equipment—a microscope —alongside which lies the *Sandoz Atlas of Haematology*. A shelf of palm branches houses *A Short Textbook of Medicine* by Houston, Joiner, and Trounce, published by English Universities Press and Alstead, MacGregor, and Girdwood. A clam shell acts as one bookend while the other end is supported by the 17th edition of Manson's *Tropical Diseases* published by Baillière Tindall, and the large New World influence of Anderson's *Pathology*. Over the primitive operating table is a device resembling a music-holder designed to supplement my somewhat rusty surgical knowledge. It holds a copy of Zollinger and Cutler's *Atlas of Surgical Operations*, published by Macmillan & Company in New York. For long periods of time my reference books are silted up with fine brown sand, but are available as a morale booster in the occasional crisis. For a slightly more personal approach to my tropical friends, on the table in the porch (accompanied by a bowl of pecan nuts and a pineapple), I keep a copy of *Clinical Tropical Diseases* by Adams and Maegraith, published by Blackwell.

In my "black bag," ingeniously adapted from strips of bamboo and covered with sharkskin, are four small and very valuable books: Pye's *Surgical Handicraft; Accident Service*, published by Pitman; Parsons's *Diseases of the Eye;* and *Local Analgesia in Dentistry* by D H Roberts and J H Sowray, the last forwarded to me by our one and only visitor last year—a lone yachtsman who had the misfortune to need an extraction at my totally incompetent hands.

In bed I never read anything remotely connected with medicine, but I do keep one book on my bedside table—*The Early Diagnosis of the Acute Abdomen* by Sir Zachary Cope, published by Oxford Medical Publications and now, after more than 50 years, in its fifteenth edition. It has a chapter on the acute abdomen in the tropics and, Capricorn and Cancer notwithstanding, many an abdomen would bask unscarred on a burnt-hot beach if more eyes had scanned its pages.

None of my patients is even slightly deaf and sinuses receive their daily washouts in the depths of the coral reef sea—which is fortunate, as I know little about ENT and have no reference book. I spent a little of my £300 on a weekly copy of *Punch*, purely for education, and the occasional copy of the *Financial Times*, for a good laugh. As copies arrive at the same time I announce that I am on holiday for a week and my privacy is respected (to the point of foolhardiness).

Although I don't take my medicine to bed with me, I do enjoy reading a chapter or two of a good book before turning out the light and, therefore, decided to take with me several books which I had read before, enjoyed thoroughly, and looked forward to reading again. J R R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* headed my list —in my opinion one of the greatest adventure stories ever written, with the added advantage that it can be read again and again with mounting enthusiasm. *A Bridge Too Far*, by Cornelius Ryan, is one of the best descriptions of close-quarters warfare ever written. It combines accurate research with a witty flowing pen making the reader acutely aware of the horrors of glorious failure—the battle of Arnhem. My tiny library is completed with *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas, *The Incredible Journey* by Sheila Burnford, and a copy of *Larousse Gastronomique*, the last providing 13 different recipes for cooking clams.

The publishers of the other books mentioned are as follows:
Medical Care in Developing Countries (Nairobi, Oxford University Press); *Sandoz Atlas of Haematology* (Basle, Sandoz); *Pathology* (St Louis, Mosby, 6th edn); *Surgical Handicraft* (Bristol, Wright, 19th edn); *Accident Service* by Plewes, L W, (Pitman, London); *Diseases of the Eye* (London, Churchill); *Lord of the Rings* (London, Allen and Unwin); *A Bridge Too Far* (New York, Simon and Schuster); *Under Milk Wood* (London, Dent); *The Incredible Journey* (London, Hodder); and *Larousse Gastronomique* (Paris, Larousse).